



SOME CHINESE CULTURAL AND ART FACTORS IN THE INDOCHINA ARCHITECTURE DECORATION IN HANOI

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ABSTRACT

Indochinese architectural style is the artistic heritage of the French that was formed during the colonial expansion in some Asian countries, including Vietnam. The special feature of these Indochinese-style architectural works is the harmonious combination of European cultural and artistic quintessence (Greek - Roman culture and art) with East Asian architectural quintessence, mainly of which is China with the ideology of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. This architectural art style is specifically shown in elements of the plan, architectural structures and most notably the system of symbols and decorative motifs which is the feature of Asian culture and philosophy, such as the eight-sign figure, yin and yang, symbols of the swastika, the word longevity, chrysanthemums, lemon flowers..., all of which are arranged harmoniously on the background of strong prominent architectural blocks of European classical style. In the development system of Vietnamese traditional art, Indochinese architectural decoration art in Hanoi is a unique expression in art creation, from the absorption and Vietnameseization of exotic cultural and artistic architectural elements, to the highlighting of the unique aesthetic thinking of Vietnamese residents.

The article provides more scientific evidence that further clarifies the similarities and differences in Chinese culture - art that affect decorative motifs on Indochinese style architecture in Hanoi - the capital of the Indochina Federation during the French colonial period (1884 - 1945).

KEYWORDS: Culture, arts, Indochinese architecture, decorative motifs, Vietnam, Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION:

Chinese culture has a great influence on neighboring countries, including Vietnam, in many aspects. In the aspect of architecture - art, the influence of Chinese culture is shown through the decorative motifs with different philosophical meanings, symbolic decorative motifs ... in the worshiping works, house architecture...

The French after imposing dominance on the whole Indochina (in the late nineteenth century) have built many architectural works to confirm their permanent presence on this land. However, when building those works, the French could not ignore the influence of Chinese cultural elements on the architecture of Vietnamese traditional houses, worship relics, therefore, the architectural works which have a harmonious combination between the elements of Chinese culture, Vietnamese culture and European culture appeared in their colonial countries, especially the cities, forming a Indochinese architectural style.

This study pointed out the elements of Chinese culture and arts that the Vietnamese selectively absorbed presenting on some Indochinese architectural works in Hanoi, the capital of the French Indochina Federation (1884 - 1945).

1. The formation of Indochinese style architecture:

In the first 20 years of the twentieth century (1901-1920) in Hanoi, a series of neoclassical architectural works were built and put into use, serving the colonial government. The architectural designs of these works often mold the archetypes of the works in French, which are not completely suitable for the climate as well as the aesthetic tradition and the landscape of the indigenous region. Therefore, the search for an architectural style that is both capable of meeting with the modern functions, as well as suitable for the climatic conditions, landscapes and cultural traditions, using local techniques and materials, was pursued by French and then Vietnamese architects, thereby creating a combined architectural style later called Indochina architectural style.

Due to the geographical feature, Vietnam is an exchange place with Chinese architecture for more than 2 millennia, with architecture of Cham, Khmer and even Japan for centuries. During the French colonial period, architecture in Vietnam existed in parallel with three systems: French architecture, Vietnamese architecture and colonial architecture. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the arrival of European missionaries and engineers and architects marked the starting point for architectural exchanges with the West.

The typical of this period which is worth-mentioning is the use of architectural language of Architect E. Hebrard. He combined various Eastern architectural languages to express a very Western atmosphere on a single facade that was one of the main languages of French classical architecture with console, lathe racing roofs, overhead roofs ... E. Hebrard has brought roofs that we have met somewhere in Vietnamese countryside, overlapping in continuous layers, making the buildings look like Thai, Cambodian or Laos architecture. On top of the roof, there are roofs that are very similar to Vietnamese

architecture. Going a little deeper into the detail of a lathe or a round window frame, we again see it similar to Chinese architecture. All the details of Vietnamese and Chinese architecture mentioned above have been cleverly arranged together in a harmonious way, not creating an over-contention, making it easy to see an East-Asian atmosphere on the surface of Western architecture.

2. The presence of Chinese cultural - artistic elements on Indochinese architectural works in Hanoi:

The characteristics of Indochina architectural style are combining Asian and European elements to create a distinct beauty. Through the process of cultural exchange between Vietnam and China, there are many Chinese cultural features that have been absorbed, transformed and become an organic part of Vietnamese traditional culture. In Indochina-style architectural works, cultural themes (motifs), via the system of Eastern cultural philosophies and conceptions, were expressed in a unique and philosophical manner. Traditional decorative art motifs on Indochina Architecture in Vietnam are shown with a variety of content and forms.

2.1. The decorative motif has philosophical meaning:

Yin and Yang philosophy:

The philosophy of yin and yang is the struggle or harmony of two seemingly opposing poles such as male - female, dynamic - static, solid - empty.... The concept of yin and yang harmony clearly expresses the Oriental philosophy on Indochina style architecture in Hanoi. In the concept of feng shui, yin and yang tiles are the harmony of heaven and earth, a favorable harmony of luck. The yin and yang roof tiles represent the symbols of heaven and earth. Especially, that combination is according to the old concept of favorable wind and rain, a peaceful and stable life. The Indochina-style architectural works of architect Arthur Kruze designed a series of villa-style buildings in Hanoi during the late 1930s and early 1940s such as the Marines Club, the villas on Ly Nam De, Ly Thuong Kiet, Phan Boi Chau, Ngoc Ha Streets... The most remarkable point of the house is the treatment of the roof in the ethnic form.

The yin-yang philosophy on Indochina-style architecture in Hanoi also shows two sides of solid and hollow through carved (yin) and embossed (yang) decorative art. At the Indochina University project, the "solid - hollow" concept of yin and yang is reflected in the main iron door system and the side room door leading to the Nguy Nhu Kon Tum hall. The iron door is the type of iron door without a back (negative) with the central part being the electric ball icon. In the set of doors leading to the Nguy Nhu Kon Tum hall, the iron door right next to the decorative arch system also has two fixed side wings on both sides, which is also according to the principle of yin and yang: the hollow frames embracing the small solid embossed pattern, in the middle of the door is the symbol of the word Universé de Indochine. Another form of yin and yang concept is shown on the two entrance doors to the

Nguy Nhu Kon Tum hall: two book symbols (the symbol of the Eight Treasures in Taoism) and a snake symbol (the symbol of Western medicine) are embossed. On the Louis Finot Museum, the philosophy of yin and yang is also very clearly expressed: the seal letter are carved (yin) in the octagon, also using the method of carving, in fact, expressing the concept of yin and yang.

The Five Elements philosophy

According to the concept of ancient Eastern philosophy, every thing that wants to have perfection and stability with the convergence of cosmic elements must have all 5 elements (Metal - Wood - Water - Fire - Earth creating a cycle), called the Five Elements; or The Five Elements are the five elements representing all matter in the world, which are compatible and incompatible: creating one another steadily and engrave each other to suppress the excess factors (Figure 3). Based on this knowledge, the Asians want to explain things and phenomena in nature and social life, such as: The law of coexistence, the law of interdependent solidarity, opposing properties, how to neutralize the antagonism, the factors of compatibility when combined together ... becoming an improvisation in human life and worldview.

The Eight Signs Conception:

Eight Signs concept according to the concept of ancient Eastern philosophy, consists of eight hexagrams in Yi Jing, is the four directions in heaven and earth, symbols of the miniature universe, hiding supernatural powers, the "heavenly mysteries". Human need to learn and grasp the knowledge about the movement of the universe to get an overview, to see the positive movements of nature to follow, while avoiding or minimizing negative movements. The Eight Signs symbol is used in Taoism to eliminate evil spirits and evil energies. In Eastern architecture and art, the concept of Eight Signs is represented in octagonal shapes. In East Asian feng shui, the longevity of the building is considered the top factor, not only being mechanically sustainable, but it also must ensure the factor of absorption of good energy sources, avoid and minimize the impacts of bad energy sources. This is one of the important factors that makes French architects select and incorporate octagonal elements into the design of Indochinese style buildings

2.2. Symbolic decorative motif:

Geometry patterns - the Swastika symbol and the Seal script:

These patterns are the decorations with geometric lines creating repetitive patterns. This is a common decorative pattern in ancient architecture, both in the East and in the West. Because of its special property which is the repetition of a basic motif, depending on the specific position in the architecture, there are different and very diverse variations. The Swastika is commonly found in the history of both Eurasian civilization, although there are different interpretations of the meaning, depending on each religion and ethnic group. The Eastern Buddhist Swastika (appearing on the chest of Shakyamuni Buddha) represents wisdom, goodness, and perfection that is one of the 32 good forms of Buddha. The text of the Swastika appearing in the front of the Indochina University building and the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also has the good meaning above

Geometric motifs:

In Vietnam, the geometric elements like the square, round, triangle, rectangle, are widely found in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, in the form of symbols and are heavy on symbolism, generalization and philosophy, with few explanations about physics (such as the sky is round, the earth is square...). Even the construction of architectural works also applies religious principles. A temple must be built with a square surface, the Buddha towers are also square (with the Buddhist conception of the Four Great), later there was also the hexagonal, the octagon Buddha towers. In Taoism building, the Eight Signs, the Five Elements concepts from Taoism were also applied, so like Confucianism buildings with the Chinese characters...

Through these Asian-European cultural quintessence, French architects have cleverly and subtly combined these elements to create a unique architectural style with full of aesthetics.

Chinese character motifs:

Is a written form of the Chinese language, having symbolic (hieroglyphic) and signifying meanings. Many countries in Asia deeply influenced by Chinese culture also use this motif in architectural decoration. The use of Chinese characters in the architectural decoration of Vietnamese people took place widely throughout the Middle Ages and modern times, as a kind of message, classic, maxim, poetry... with the meaning of setting an example, teaching, reminding, encouraging ... In the Vietnamese, the influence of Confucianism and Chinese culture is very deep, so it is no coincidence that the architectural style imported from France accepts the Asian element as an important part to create the Indochinese style.

Animals decorative motifs:

Dragon: in Vietnamese culture, dragon is a sacred animal, representing power, strength, water source, god of destiny... and has many different abilities. The dragon appears at the roof of The History Museum is sculpted with the head of the consoles to support the roof protruding from the building. According to the author, this dragon's head image has the main function of protecting the building and preventing fire, because the materials to create Vietnamese architectural works are wood, bamboo, and rattan ... which are very flammable. Carving images of dragons - water dragons, with clouds wrapped around columns, rafters... depending on the nature of the project, there must be appropriate content, taking the function of fire treatment, overcoming the risk of fire into account.

The bat: according to the Chinese conception, bat is an animal with "blessing". People took the image of this animal to pray for happiness and joy; the symbol of the five bats is the "five blessings"

Carp: In the opinion of the Asians in general, the Vietnamese in particular, the carp is a symbol of prosperity, abundance and wealth. The figure of a carp appeared in the dome decoration of the main hall of Indochina University.

Plants decorative motifs:

Decorative arts have a characteristic language expressed by the "pattern" form. Traditional patterns are derived from the familiar flowers and plants (together with animals) of the nature. People tend to describe and stylize them to make them beautiful.

In general, plants play an important role in the material and spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Living between plants and thanks to the plants, transforming into plants after death, therefore, since ancient times, people have had a belief in worshipping trees, trees are seen as a mediating bridge between heaven and earth. The types of trees and flowers used to make decorative motif include: Bodhi leaves taken from the Buddhist teachings - mean enlightenment trees or wisdom trees, prevent people from the dull realms; lemon flower - the flower which represents light, elegance, closeness; lotus flower, lotus bud - represent purity, sacrifice; conifer - represents affirmation, honesty; peony - noble and beautiful. The image of the rice flower represents prosperity, the image of the laurel wreath is the glory, the holly leaf represents the nobility...

Each plant species used as a decorative motif in Indochinese University architecture has its own message, it is both knowledge and art, symbolism and profound education.

3. Similarities and differences with Chinese culture and arts in Indochinese architecture in Hanoi:

Researching on Vietnamese architecture, many people believe that it is a copy of Chinese architecture because Vietnam depended thousands of years on Chinese feudal dynasties. However, many studies also show that, despite the influences of Chinese culture, Vietnamese architectural works have their own mark, showing their unique creativity to suit the material and spiritual life. In order to clarify the receptive relationship with Chinese art and culture, but with its own unique characteristics of Vietnamese culture of Indochina architecture in Hanoi, the article uses documents about two typical works, one is the headquarters building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Vietnam History Museum building, the other is the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taiwan.

The Head Office Building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was designed by architect Ernest Hebrard in 1924, started construction in 1925 and completed in 1928 with an H-shaped architectural space. The work is a harmonious combination of indigenous architecture and French architecture, focusing on gardens and streets, emphasizing the balance of architectural blocks. This is a major breakthrough in French architecture Vietnam in particular and Indochina in general.

The most typical East Asian characteristic is reflected in the multi-layered tiled roof system, especially the large roof in the central block of the main façade together with the stratified roof shading windows and the foyer roof. The system of open cells, windows, balcony doors and walls, which are up to 80 cm thick, of the building are like natural air conditioning system against harsh Northern weather. In front of the building, there are 2 small architectural blocks with an equilateral octagon shape, two eight-pointed roofs simulating the Eight Signs shape, which function as two security guard stations and also the pillar part of the entrance to the building.

The Vietnam History Museum building designed by architects C.Batteur and E. Hébrard in 1925, started in 1926, completed in 1932 is one of the typical works of Indochina Architecture style, with many unique indigenous architectural elements that are cleverly combined with French architecture. The main door of the building is arranged by 3 front arches and 2 side arches. The main space of the octagonal hall has 4 large sides and four smaller sides,

the roof of the high-rise octagonal hall divided into eight wings also follows the body of the hall with 4 large and 4 small hallways. The building facade is emphasized by the roof system with octagonal shape protruding above the building. The entire roof system for the display areas is structured in the style of overlapping double-layered roofs, which is commonly found in traditional Vietnamese religious and belief works. The lower roof layer protruding the outside wall system, effectively shading the sun and preventing rain for the lower door system, creating a distinct Asian look.

Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall designed by architect Yang Cho-cheng was started on October 31, 1976, inaugurated on April 5, 1980. The work is a combination of many elements of traditional Chinese architecture to recall Zhongshan Lang in Nanjing, China.

From the main hall, looking up to the ceiling, there is a dome containing the symbol of Blue Sky with a White Sun of the Kuomintang. Seen from the outer facade of the building, the body of the Memorial House has a square cylinder that gradually reduced to the upper side like a miniature castle with the main door as the gate, the entire architectural block is closed. The roof of the memorial house is divided into two layers with eight equal upper and eight lower wings. The gap between the two roof floors is also open cells, the roof is supported by a overlapping structure system, which is very popular in traditional Asian architecture. From the main features of the three buildings mentioned above, it is possible to point out the similarities and differences in the design of works of both Vietnam and Taiwan as mentioned above.

*SIMILARITIES:

Vietnam and China have interference in many different aspects such as culture, religion, art... and are influenced by the philosophy of these fields. Architecture, painting, sculpture itself was born to serve religious and cultural purposes, and then to serve daily life. Art is the quintessence of culture, bringing the essence of philosophy. Due to the historical characteristics of the relations between the two countries, Vietnam is influenced by all three ideas of Chinese Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and the architectural system of these religions in China was developed in a large and methodical manner, from the central to the local level. Vietnamese feudal dynasties from the Ly dynasty have absorbed and learned many quintessence of Chinese architecture.

In the scope of this article, we refer to some typical buildings of Taiwan.

- The presence of the Eight Signs decorative motifs and symbols, variations of the Yin and Yang, the Five Elements in Taoism. These decorative motifs have all appeared in documented works (Figure 1,2,3,4).
- Tiled roof with overlapping support structure which is widely used in Buddhist architectural works (Figure 5).
- Factor 8 used in architecture: number 8 is a beautiful number that contains many contents, such as the wishes of East Asian residents, which appears much in the philosophy of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism such as the Eightfold Path, the Eight Treasures... In folk life, number 8 is pronounced in as "bat", Vietnamese people deviate into "Phat" in "prosperity" (Figure 6)

* Differences:

Beside the similarities, the two artistic architectures are also different, stemming from three basic reasons: the difference in natural conditions; the difference in economic, social, historical circumstances; and the differences in the artistic creation process of the previous generations. These three factors are also the main factors that form the national identity of an architecture.

- To suit the natural conditions and climate, each country has found the most suitable architectural forms to cope with the harsh conditions of nature. The Chinese have formed a form of "closed architecture" with the characteristic that the architectural layout is enclosed around a yard, people only use the internal space, the outer space has a wall which is made very thick to insulate, with few open windows... Meanwhile, in order to suit the hot and humid environment, Vietnamese people formed the form of "open architecture" which manifests in the typical features which are: tall, airy, easy to access to nature and outside space. Vietnamese architectural works are often designed with thin walls, with many windows and focus on natural elements such as trees, water surface.
- Social factor is also a factor that makes the difference between the two architectures. The Chinese history of many thousands of years is the history of wars of invasion, expansion, and this is also shown in architecture. The Chinese buildings are often massive, creating a feeling of overwhelming, often using prominent colors to highlight the works in the middle of nature. On the contrary, architectural works in Vietnam always have proportional ratio to nature and people, elegant colors, the work is just a highlight between majestic nature. The difference between Vietnamese and Chinese traditional architecture is the result of the process of artistic creation through generations of the two countries.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Vietnamese architecture is completely different from Chinese architecture in nature, although the external forms also easily cause the misunderstanding that these two architectures are the same in all aspects. In other words, the difference is very prominent from the similarities because the similarities are only external appearances, but the content inside is very different.

CONCLUSION:

The emergence of traditional decorative art on Indochina Style Architecture in Hanoi is a rather unique phenomenon in the development history of Vietnamese art. It is considered the foundation of a new architectural - artistic style, in which the combination of Chinese cultural elements with Western architecture - art is the most important feature.

- The combination of Chinese art in Indochinese architecture is indispensable to the cultural, aesthetic as well as environmental needs of local residents.
- The selective absorption of the cultural quintessence of the countries, in this case, the art of architectural decoration is the enrichment of knowledge of indigenous architecture.
- The combination of Chinese and Western architectural decorative elements has produced a new architectural style that meets the aesthetic cultural needs of both Europe and Asia.
- The uniqueness and specialties of Indochinese architecture contribute significantly to the development of Vietnamese architecture, adding many unique elements to Vietnamese culture.

Indochinese style architecture in Hanoi with similar characteristics, from the architectural form to the decorative motif and patterns, to that of China, are all absorbed in the process of cultural and artistic exchange. Through that, traditional Vietnamese decorative arts have had sudden and unique developments, so that it can be continued, adapted and enduring. It can be seen that traditional culture - art is best preserved through innovation, affirming its position in the process of cultural exchange and development.

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Figure 1: A stylized Eight Signs motif is used to become two gate posts, as well as a security boot of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building.



Figure 2: Eight Signs motif shown in the body of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall with 4 sides symbolizing the Four Symbols, leading up to the roof with 2 floors divided by 8 equal wings representing the Eight Signs



Figure 3: Eight Signs motif is applied to become the hall, the main door of the building of the Vietnam History Museum



Figure 5: Similarity in the design shown in an octagonal roof system and the use of a overlapping support structure of two works, Vietnam History Museum and Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall - Taiwan



Figure 4: The pentagon gate symbolizes the Five Elements in Taoism